KRISHNA RAO AND CHANDRABHAGA DEVI

By E. Krishna Iyer

(Review of dance given in September 1944)

(Mr. Iyer is the most impartial, just, progressive and energetic figure who played the most important part both figuratively and literally at a critical stage in the struggle for the survival of dancing particularly of BHARATA NATYAM. He has written extensively on this art in the leading Tamil and English quarterlies, papers and journals and has published authoritative works on the subject. The extract from his article reproduced below indicates the prominent position held by Mr. and Mrs. Krishna Rao in the realm of classical dancing today).

If there is any name in the field of art which is exploited to the fullest possible extent by all the sundry, it is that of Mr. Meenakshi-sundaram Pillai of Pandanallur. This grand old nattuvanar (dancer master) of about 72 years of age is the seion of a family noted for its rich artistic traditions dating from the days of the famous Chinnah Ponniah and Vadivulu Brothers, who were the contemporaries of Thyagaraja in the golden age of Carnatic music. He combines in himself prfound knowledge of the theory and practice of the art of Bharata Natya and has trained successive generations of artistree. But how far and how many of the latter have been successful in portraying the characteristic beauty and glory of this great is doubtful.

THE RENAISSANCE & AFTER

It is now history, that after 6 years of my intensive spade work through precept and practice on the stage to revive this ancient art from oblivion, culminating in my famous controversy with a notable social reformer, in December 1932 over it, brought in a surging wave of new enthusiasm for it, and that the visit of Uday Shankar to the South in 1933 and my own to the All-India Music Conference at Benares in 1934 along with a talented lady artiste of Madras established the renaissance in this art on a fairly secure basis. An art which was shunned by the so-called respectable people as untouchable and unseeable once more came to be the most glamourous and paying feature of our art institutions. However, much one may feel proud over these things, one has not much reason to feel equality so about the way in which the art has developed subseequently. Too much commercialism set in to exploit this new found enthusiasm. While professionals rushed in to make money out of it, others did not hesitate to create stunts out of it, with the result, that standards and tastes in it have not only been lowered but also have brought it to the verge of its being cosidered as after all a type of rugged art of over developed technique without much of grace that is a 'sine quanon' for any piece of appreciable art in these days.

This art is one of the most difficult to practice and it requires a rare combinatoin of proper age, physical proportions, and beauty of appearance, supplences of body and limbs, mobile facial features, music of a high order, much practice, patience and experience and above all an innate artistic sense, to portray it in all its best and graceful aspects. Gowri of Mylapore at her was perhaps the last of veterans who had this rare combination of necessary qualities. After her, it is doubtful whether any other particularly among the present generation of artistes has been able to approach her standard. It is true, some of the notable Madras artistes gave an added charm to the art by improving the quality of the accompanying orchestra and bringing out a variegated repectoirs of new and attractive songs. But they contributed to

an over emphasis on the abhinaya aspect almost to the extent of eclipsing the beauty and importance of the more universal aspect of its rhythmic nuances. Hence I felt the pressing need to bring that aspect to its own and also to introduce the art among the cultured people of non-professional classes in the interests of its further development so as to suit modrne conditions.

THE KRISHNA RAO COUPLE.

With this background I went to witness the dances of Mr. U.S. Krishna Rao and his wife Chandrabhaga Devi and lot to my great old veteran in all its purity beauty and grace. I could not but feel, that for once in his life, Meenakshisundaram has been fortunate in enterusting his art to the hands of a proper and intelligent type of disciples that it requires.

Mr. Krishna Rao is an M.Sc. and a lecturer in Chemisty at the Central College, Bangalore. His wife has read up to the B.Sc. High education by itself may not guarantee good art and their uniquencess does not lie in their high academic qualifications alone. Both are endowed with prepossessing personality and suppleness of body and limbs. They appear to have personality and suppleness of body and limbs. They appear to have commandable mastery of the technique and their art is replets with the characteristic wealth and varisty of the adavu jathis of the Meenakshisundaram school. Exhilarating rhythmic precision is a marked feature of that school and the couple are not lacking in it notwithstanding stray lapse. Above all, their art is marked by a dignified a grace of pose and movements which is not ordinarily found in many of the present day disciples of that great teacher. This is arrestingly attractive particularly in Mrs. Krishna Rao with her slender build and exquisite proportions and reveals the inner artistic sense that guides her in manipulating these poses and movements which often reminds one of the enchanting figures in the famous sculptures and paintings connected with the art. The male partner is aprightly and bubbling with enthusiasm. The woman, as becoming her sex, is comparatively modest and restrained. It is a study not only in contrast relating to the fundamental characteristics of mand and woman as displayed in art, but also in the synthesis of the two types dealing with the same sart in unison into a harmonious whole, with simultaneous or symmetrical poses and movements as occasion requires.

VIVACIOUS AND SUSTAINING ART

On the whole their art was vivacious and sustained the interest of the audience from beginning to end. They had very little of the adventitious aid of spectacular make up or dress or modern paraphernalia of stage showmanship. What dress they has was traditional but refined. With all their precision in rhythm and variety of advu-jathis their stepping was agreeably light in contrast to the ordinary heavy thumping of the average disciples of Meenakshisundaram. They had only the traditional programme of anutch concert (except for an interlude of the snake snake charmer) with alarippu Jathiswara Sabdha, Varna, Tillana and a few songs for abhinaya. Only, instead of filling their ab abhinaya part with the hackayed pales, they had some of the masterpieces of Thygaraja, Gopalakrishna Bharati also like "Rara Sita" and "Natanamadinar". Their culture and education had evidently helped them in the choice of their songs and refinement of abhinaya avoiding vulgarity and verbalism that are so common among professionals of lower sort.

Partly on account of mistaken conceptions about the art and mostly for want of necessary patience and sincerity in learning it in full, some of the nep-artistes, including the so-called cultural ones, have of late developed a craze to bring in incongrous innovations from other systems under the pretext of improving the

art of working out a synthesis of various systems. Fortunately the Krishna Rao couple were free from such aberrations.

INSPIRING MODELS

The slight of a cultured husband and wife appearing as partners in a dance had a peculiar charm, dignity and charm, dignity and chasteness about it, reminding us of its mythological and spiritual as ociations. Did no Parvathi and Parameswara themselves take to its as partners. In this they fulfilled the long cherished dreams and hopes of art workers like myself. It is such people who add irresproachable respectability and status to the art and provide inspiring models for others.

For a long time, it was thought that this art was an exclusive monopoly of women and that men with coarsenesss could not do justice ot it. Perhaps some of the men who took to it gave room for that kind of notion by their ungainly handling of it, Mr. Krishna Rao's graceful rendering of the art removed all such misgivings and proved that lasya is not taboo for man and that the latter too by proper cultivation can have his part in the art.

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DECCAN HERAID DATED 25.10.1948

The Bangalore branch of the International Y Men's Club presented Mr. U.S. Krishna Rao and his wife, Srimathi Chandrabagha Devi, in an Indian Classical Dance Recital, at the Sir Puttanna Chetty Town Hall, on Saturday evening in aid of the City Y.M.C.A. Building Extension Fund.

In the unavoidable absence of Mr. K.C.Reddy, Justice N.Bala-Krishnaiah presided.

The well-chosen programme contained 14 items, including some of the old favourities like the Nataraja Dance, Ras Leela, the Snake Charmer and the Mohini Attam.

Mr. Krishna Rao and partner rendered all the pieces with grace and a fine refinement of technique. The highlight of the recital was easily the episode from the Mahabharata, where Lord Krishna preaches Gita to Arjuna. Danced throughout on a fast and following tempo, and ably supported by the musical accompanishment, this numberlicited rounds of appaluses from the audience.

DECCAN HERALD:

CLASSICAL DANCING.

Mr. and Mrs. U.S. Krishna Rao and party gave a recital of classical Indian dancing last Sunday and Monday evening in the Canara Union New Hall at Malleswaram, in aid of the Bangalore Gymkhana.

An appreciative audience sat through three hours of the programme and it is a measure of its success that the auditorium remainded almost as full at the end as it was in the beginning. This is a welcome sigh, for it shows that there are individuals in Bangalore who can derive some enjoyment from classical art.

The programmes contained in all 13 items among which four were outstanding. The Shiva-Parvathi Nrithya in the Durbar of the Gods was imaginatively conceived and spectacularly presented.

Krishna Rao's solo number the "Gitopadesha" with its weird accompaniement of drama and its sudden spells of frenzied dancing, make a deep impression on the audience. The "Thillana" in Shankarabharana, rendered as in dance duet by Krishna Rao and his wife was a very pleasing invocation. Another piece that received the applause it deserved, was Mrs. Krishna Rao's Mohini Attam", interpreted gracefully and in the orthodox manner.

THE STATESMAN, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19.1951

DANCES OF INDIA AT NEW EMPIRE.

By or Dramatic Critic.

Deepkala, an organisation devoted to the promotion of dance, drama and music, presented "Dances of India" at the new Empire Theatre, Calcutta, on Tuesday in aid of the project to build a new hospital in the city, and sponsored by the International Club of Calcutta. The show will be repeated at 9 tonight.

Two talented dancers from South India, Krishna Rao and his wife, Chandra, who made their first appearance in Calcutta last night, impressed the large audience with their vigour and variety. They are well versed in the difficult classical technique of Bharat Natyam, which requires a high degree of concentrationsand skill. They presented a delightful contrast and, at moments, succeeded in capturing the qualities of figures in ancient Indian temples. Their most successful joint performance was "Uma Tandav" in which Shiva dances through destruction to repose.

Of the individual performance given by Krishna Rao, Gitopadesha, in the Kathakali style, was notable. Much of its appeal was no doubty due to the theme - the paralysis of will that Arjuna suffers on the battle-field when faced with the appalling prosepct of carnage, and his recovery after the cosmic revelation by Krishna. Krishna Rao rendered the theme of the Song Celestial with admirable vigour. His "The Fisherman's Tragedy" was equally good, through brief. The musical accompani ent was excellent.

DECCAN HERALD.

TRIBUTE.

To: The Editor, "Deccan Herald".

Sir,

I was one among the audience who had a delightful evening at the Town Hall on September 6, All the three troupes of artistes that took part were at their best and the dances by Mr. U.S. Krishna Rao and his wife Cha drabagha Devi which was the main item of entertainment engaged my attention. These two artistes who have earned a wide reputation for their skilful and expert expceition of the Bharata Natyam added one more feather to their cap. They were at their best and aided by their talented students, the whole performance was a grand success.

Bangalore, September 9. "A SPECTATOR".

MYSINDIA, July 12, 1953.

TERPSICHORE.

An ardent devotes of Terpsichore and a fervent exponent of Bharata Natyam and Kathakali, Prof. U.S.Krishna Rao is a well-known figure in culture I circles in Bangalore. Though a man of science and a lecturer on Chemistry by profession, Indian classical dancing has always been the dominating force in his life.

Intellectual vigour, versatility and enthusiasm are keynotes of his character. Not content with making a name for himself as a dancer and teacher of dancing, he has taken it upon himself to educate the layman, and the many interesting lecturers he has given on Indian dancing have helped the public of Bangalore to understand and appreciate this most complicated and scientific of arts.

Prof. Krishna Rao has frequently performed before Bangalore audiences. He is always accompained by his wife Chandrabagha Devi, who is herself an accomplished dancer. The Professor's energy and clear-cut technique pair admirably with his wife's grace and delicate sense of rhythm, and it is a pleasure to see the two of them together on the stages.

At a recent dance recital at the Twon Hall, Prof.Krishna Rao revealed once again, not only his flair for dancing, but his skill as a choreographer, for most of the items on the programme were compositions of his own. A stickler for convention and techniques, he never loses sight of the strict rules and regu ations of the highly stylized sets of Bharata Natyam and Kathakali yet finds ample scope for his creative ima ination, and his compositions are original and surge with vibrant life.

In Kamadhan the Prof. as Shiva was very well complemented by Chandrabagha Devi who took the part of Parvathi. The lighting affect was admirable, throwing the dancers into sharp relief.

BAHUBALI another of the Professor's compositions in a dance full of vitality. Supporting the Professor in this item was T.S. Bhat one of his pupils. Filling the roles of rival brothers who match their forces against each other, in their fight for superiority, both master and student were able to give full vent to their physical strength and muscular energy. Here again the stage lighting left nothing to be x desired.

ZARINA.

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THE HINDUSTANM TIMES, SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 1954:

BHARATA NATYAM RECITAL BY PROF. KRISHNA RAO

Kannada Cultural Festival.

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The highlight in the second day's programme was a Bharat-natyam recital by Prof. U.S.Krishna Rao of Mysore University and his wife Mrs. Chandrabagha. The numbers included solo performances of Alarippu and Mohini Attam by Mrs. Chandrabaga and Tragedy of life (an original composition in Bharatanatyam style) by Prof. Krishna Rao who, though an engineer, is not merely an accomplished dancer but a scholar with a thorough knowlede and history of this style of classical dancing. There were two dust items, the NATANAM ADINAR, the famours composition based on a song by Bharati, and a Tillana. There has been good many charming Bharatanatyam recitals in Delhi by reputed dancers but it was a unique experience to witness Prof. Rao's presentation of Friday.

On the previous evening, he had explained the alphabets of Bharatanatyam, that is, the foot-work, hand-gestures and facial expressions. At Friday's performance the professor prefaced every recital with brief explanatory remarks and a brief interpretative recital of each number in slow tempo with a lucid English translation of the accompanying song. The duet recitals of NATANAM ADINAR and TILLANA brought out the contrast between the masculine and feminine forms of the same theme adopts depending on whether tha dancer is a man or a woman. This technique was employed, Prof.Rao explained, in the introductory remarks, as some critics mistakenly believed Bharatanatyam to be a dance-medis only for women.

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